



The Wombats

BY NEVIN MARTELL

WHAT THE FUCK ARE WOMBATS ANYWAY? The zoologist's answer would be that they are nocturnal Australian marsupials with a penchant for burrowing tunnels and chomping greens, but the musicologist's answer would be vastly different. It might go something like this: The Wombats are a quirky pop trio from Liverpool who specialize in energetic, danceable tunes filled with tongue-in-cheek lyrics and more hooks than Evander Holyfield. Considering it'd be impossible to fit a hirsute rodent onto an iPod, let's concentrate on the latter.

Guitarist/singer Matthew "Murph" Murphy, drummer/singer Dan Haggis and bassist Tord Øverland-Knudsen met while attending the Paul McCartney-sanctified Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) in 2003. At first, their attempts to make music were less-than-serious. "We started out as a comedy band," admits Murph. "We used to try and destroy perfectly good pop songs by suddenly screaming in the middle of them. Unfortunately, no one understood our surreal sense of humor, so we changed tack." They became more devoted to the craft of writing single-friendly fare in the vein of Madness and Art Brut, while keeping

their sense of humor alive by dubbing themselves The Wombats. "It's no stupider than Arctic Monkeys," Murph says, only half-defensively.

After churning out a series of hokey ditties that they would all rather put behind them (including one about an ostrich), Murph stumbled onto the band's future sound when he wrote the skittish-pop dreamer "Moving to New York" after fantasizing about escaping the quiet drudgery of industrial Liverpool. "I didn't think anything of it until I really *heard* it when we practiced it in rehearsal," Murph reveals. "Dan and Tord kept saying, 'We've got to do this one; it's a hit.' So I don't really listen to my stomach anymore; I just listen to the other guys."

This watershed moment sparked a burst of creativity for Murph, who turned out a quick string of tunes, including "Lost in the Post" and "'Patricia the Stripper,'" both of which he ultimately had a chance to solo strum for McCartney in a one-on-one songwriting workshop. "I told him, 'Patricia the Stripper' is about falling in love with a whore," Murph recounts. "And he looked at me and I looked at him and he said, 'That seems like a bad idea.' I think it's a classic story now,

but at the time I remember thinking, 'What the fuck did I just say to Paul McCartney?'"

One of the next songs to come through the pipe was "Let's Dance to Joy Division," a spiky pop stomper that's so catchy you can imagine Ian Curtis happily lurching in his grave to its contagious beat. "People misinterpret that song and think we're taking the piss out of Joy Division," Murph bemoans. "But we love them and [Joy Division/New Order bassist] Peter Hook is actually a big fan of the song. I wrote it after I was in a bar with my current girlfriend. We were pissed and we kissed while dancing on the table to 'Love Will Tear Us Apart.' It was one of those great moments in life when you can't believe something so good is happening to you."

These songs ended up providing the backbone for *The Wombats* EP and the forthcoming debut full-length, *A Guide to Love, Loss & Desperation*. In the U.K., the trio is already the darling of the indie press and has earned itself a devout fan base that routinely bombards the band at concerts with everything from glow sticks and knitted scarves to wombat mascots and Valentine's cards. The Wombats may have started out as a joke, but now it seems they're getting the last laugh. **F**

3 albums that inspired The Wombats' Matthew Murphy to make music



ELLIOTT SMITH

From a Basement on the Hill

A harrowing album of what sounds like Elliott's final thoughts. Probably not his best album, but the gravity of its post-death release makes for an extremely dramatic listen.



HEFNER

The Fidelity Wars

A tongue-in-cheek album about heartache and alcohol. The grittiness has been an inspiration for me and Darren Hayman is proof that the best singers can't actually sing.



DEPECHE MODE

Music for the Masses

Pop sensibilities with relatively black and simple lyrics really float my boat—Martin Gore's songwriting combined with Dave Gahan's voice is an absolute winner.